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CONTINUING

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WHAT is the true purpose of Sunday-school teaching? Aim clearly recognized determines means, method, and spirit. No more fundamental question, therefore, can be asked respecting the work of the Sunday-school teacher than this. The answer must be based, not on mere names, for institutions often grow beyond their names; nor merely on past history, for the past is not necessarily the measure of the present. Appeal must rather be made to the place which the Sunday school is actually filling or attempting to fill in the complex work of the church and the kingdom.

The Sunday school is somewhat more than a school. Some of its exercises belong rather to worship than to instruction; its characterization as the children's church, most unfortunate in some respects, is not wholly wrong. But instruction holds, or certainly ought to hold, the central place. The Sunday school is essentially a school, and specifically a school for the study and teaching of the Bible. Even those who dislike the name Bible school will admit that, whatever the purpose of the school founded by Robert Raikes, this term correctly describes the character of the institution according to the now generally accepted ideal. But if this be so, it follows that the aim of the teaching done in the Sunday school ought to be the acquisition on the part of the pupil of knowledge of the Bible.

Yet this is not all that is to be said. Another fact must be taken into account before this definition be accepted as adequate.

ITS ULTIMATE PURPOSE RELIGIOUS The Sunday school as now existing is an agency of the Christian church. It is to be classed along with public worship, preaching, and prayer meetings, as one of the means by which the church seeks to accomplish its great aim, the conversion of men and their cultivation in Christian character. Occupying this position, the Sunday school cannot find its ultimate aim merely in the acquisition or impartation of knowledge, even though it be knowledge of the Bible. It must seek a moral and not merely an intellectual end; it must aim at character as well as knowledge. And, if so, then of course the moral must be the ultimate aim; knowledge of the Bible, the means to the end; and the aim of Sunday-school teaching must be recognized to be, through teaching of the Bible, to secure the conversion of the pupil, and his development in Christian character.

Such a conception of the purpose of Sunday-school teaching gives to the Sunday school a distinct and definite place. It distinguishes it from other schools which, though they may not exclude the Bible from the curriculum, do not make it the only or even the chief subject of study, and which, though they recognize the necessity of including the cultivation of character in their aim, assign to it at the most a place alongside the storing and training of the mind. It assigns to the Sunday school a definite place in the varied activities of the church, distinguishing it from the ordinary public service in which, though biblical instruction is included, worship and the immediate application of truth to life are the determinative elements; from the prayer meeting, the characteristics of which are the interchange of Christian experience and the cultivation of the devotional spirit; from the evangelistic service, where the human will is directly addressed, and men are urged to right decision; and from the philanthropic work of the church, in which the spirit of Christianity expresses itself in deeds of kindness. Such a conception of the work of the Sun-

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL HAS A DISTINCTIVE PLACE OF ITS OWN

day school recognizes the peculiar relation of our religion to the Bible, and the necessity that underneath worship and devotion, ethical instruction and persuasion of the will, missions and philanthropy, there shall be a firm foundation of knowledge of that preëminent revelation of God which is the source and support of Christianity. It recognizes the need of one service, which, having the same ultimate aim as that which is sought in all the activities of the church, shall seek that end specifically by instruction in the Bible.

If it be asked why the Sunday school should seek its ultimate aim in a sense by indirection, why the ultimate purpose should not in every service of the church be directly and avowedly sought, at least two valid answers may be given. In the first place, there are certain ends which, at least with some people, are best attained by indirection. It has long been recognized that the affections are best cultivated, not by commanding ourselves to love those to whom we owe love, but by pursuing a course of action which tends indirectly to cultivate love. The same principle holds in the cultivation of character. What argument and appeal and exhortation wholly fail to accomplish can with some minds—perhaps it is true to a certain extent of all minds—be accomplished little by little through instruction, conveyed either in the exposition of teachings, or in the study of history, especially of biography. And, in the second place, it must certainly be acknowledged that the most solid results in character cannot be attained except upon a broad foundation of knowledge. The fervent appeal, often spurning knowledge and ignoring instruction, may seem at the time to be most effective in saving men and advancing the interests of Christianity. But all experience proves that alike in the life of the individual and the development of the kingdom, real and permanent progress is made only when zeal rests on a solid foundation of knowledge of the truth. The letters of Paul, especially those of the latter part of his life, lay great emphasis upon the necessity that love shall abound in knowledge and discernment.

*REASONS FOR
THIS DEFINITION
OF ITS AIM*

The conception of the purpose of Sunday-school teaching which we are advocating, viz., that it is to seek the common end of all religious activity, the conversion and moral cultivation of men, by a distinctive method, instruction in the Bible, has important relations to almost every problem of Sunday-school management. The character of the curriculum, the qualifications of teachers, and the method of study and of instruction will all be in no small degree determined by its acceptance or rejection. If the Sunday school is a school and is to attain its end primarily through instruction in the Bible, does it follow that it ought to have a definite curriculum, each year's work of which shall be adapted to the pupil's stage of development? And will a graded curriculum do away with the principle of uniformity so long followed? If the Sunday school is a real educational institution, can it be carried on by untrained teachers, and, if not, what is the nature of the training required, and what are the necessary qualifications, intellectual and moral, to be demanded in teachers? Have we today, can we have in the near future, any large number of teachers who possess these qualifications? If not, must we secure proper teaching by a system of larger classes fewer in number? And will this again affect in an important way our church architecture? Finally, if instruction is the central function, and yet not the only function, of the Sunday school, what are the other legitimate departments of its work, and how are these departments related to the teaching work and to one another? It is our purpose to take up some of these questions for discussion in the BIBLICAL WORLD from time to time. It must suffice for the present to name them.